

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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**PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND
2012 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL
SALMON FISHING**

General Information

This outlook is provided to assist the commercial salmon industry in planning for the 2012 season in the Prince William Sound (PWS) Management Area (Area E). Preseason forecasts are the basis for the information provided. Area E forecasts can be found on ADF&G's web site:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareapws.salmon#/forecasts>

PWSAC hatchery forecasts can be found on the PWSAC web site:

<http://pwsac.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/2012-PWSAC-Forecast.pdf>

Inseason modifications to harvest projections, season opening dates, and strategies for weekly fishing periods will likely occur as the fisheries develop. Hatchery Annual Management Plans (AMP) are used to provide guidelines to the department when managing fisheries to achieve cost recovery and broodstock objectives. Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) and Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation's (PWSAC) AMPs underwent Regional Planning Team (RPT) review on April 16, and were then submitted for the Commissioner's signature.

The forecasts for commercial common property fishery (CCPF) harvests by species are summarized in Table 1. The department continues to forecast wild fish runs, but the department no longer forecasts any hatchery runs except Gulkana Hatchery sockeye salmon. All other hatchery run projections are provided by either PWSAC or VFDA. Run projections for species and districts without formal forecasts are based on average historical production. These projections will provide the basis for early season management in all districts. Harvest projections for enhanced runs may change depending upon the success of hatchery cost recovery sales.

Management of PWS commercial salmon fisheries occurs from the Cordova area office. All emergency order announcements of fishery openings and closures are broadcast on VHF FM-07. As was done last year, fishery announcements from the Cordova ADF&G office will routinely occur at 2:00 p.m. and will normally provide a minimum of 15 hours advanced notice. Emergency

order announcement information is also transmitted by FAX to all registered processors, local radio stations, and news media in Cordova and Valdez. Announcement recordings will be available for gillnet fisheries at 907-424-7535 and seine fisheries at 907-424-7345. In addition, announcement recordings are available in Anchorage at 907-267-2843. Daily announcements are compiled and may be found on the ADF&G web site at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

The first announcement will be released at 2:00 pm Wednesday, May 2 concerning the Copper River District.

On March 23, 2012, the PWSAC Board of Directors approved the annual corporate budget for Fiscal Year 2012. The overall pink salmon and Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) chum salmon revenue goals are \$5,914,974 and \$1,474,316, respectively.

The projected PWSAC pink salmon harvest goal (cost recovery and broodstock) is 17% of the total forecasted 19.6 million pink salmon run to PWSAC hatcheries. PWSAC plans to harvest 37% of the 1.0 million chum salmon run to WNH to meet their cost recovery and broodstock goals. PWSAC does not plan to use any of the 1.2 million sockeye salmon run to Main Bay Hatchery (MBH) for cost recovery, but does have a broodstock harvest goal of 8,940 fish.

The VFDA 2012 AMP identifies a pink salmon revenue goal of \$3.5 million. Based on VFDA's 13.5 million pink salmon forecast for the Solomon Gulch Hatchery (SGH) and a sales price estimated at \$0.45/pound, VFDA will require approximately 2.4 million pink salmon with an average weight of 3.33 lbs/fish to meet their 2012 revenue goal. A minimum of 346,000 additional pink salmon will be needed for broodstock. VFDA's corporate cost recovery and broodstock needs are approximately 20% of the VFDA forecast for the total SGH pink salmon run.

Gillnet Fishery

Copper River District

Copper River District will open for the 2012 season during the week of May 14. The 2012 commercial common property harvest projections for the Copper River District are 1.3 million sockeye, 281,000 coho, and 20,000 Chinook salmon. The Chinook salmon harvest projection is the maximum harvest that could be achieved and still meet the minimum escapement goal of 24,000 given the total run projection. The 2012 inriver goal past the Miles Lake sonar is 684,000 to 1,074,000 salmon. The upper Copper River sustainable escapement goal (SEG) is 360,000 to 750,000 natural sockeye salmon, and the Copper River delta SEG is 55,000 to 130,000. The department's goal is to maintain the long-term average of 450,000 sockeye salmon in the upper Copper River spawning escapement, and 84,500 sockeye salmon in the Copper River delta spawning escapement. The components of the inriver goal are as follows:

Spawning escapement	360,000 sockeye
Other salmon	17,500 salmon
Subsistence	71,000 salmon
Personal Use harvest	120,000 salmon
Sport fishery	15,000 salmon
Gulkana broodstock	20,000 sockeye
Gulkana Hatchery surplus	80,500 sockeye
Total	684,000 salmon

The initial management strategy will be based on anticipated weekly sockeye and Chinook salmon harvests for the Copper River District and additional assessments of river conditions, fishing effort, harvest location, and consistency of harvest. When river conditions allow the deployment of the Miles Lake sonar, the attainment of the desired inriver escapement range for the upper Copper River becomes the main factor in deciding management strategy. Two evenly spaced commercial fishing periods per week will be the preferred management approach. However, the fishing schedule may be adjusted inseason as situations dictate. By late June, aerial estimates of sockeye salmon escapement trends on the Copper River Delta are also considered when scheduling fishing periods.

During the 2003 Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) meeting, the BOF modified 5 AAC 24.361, Copper River District Chinook Salmon Fishery Management Plan, by eliminating the language in the plan that calls for a 5% reduction in harvest potential. At this meeting the BOF also modified the Copper River District Chinook Salmon Fishery Management Plan to direct the department to achieve a Chinook salmon spawning escapement goal of 24,000 or greater. During the 2005 BOF meeting, the BOF amended the Copper River Chinook Salmon Management Plan to limit fishing in most waters inside of the barrier islands, 'inside closure area', to one fishing period per week during statistical weeks 20 and 21. **Most recently, during the 2011 BOF meeting, the Copper River Chinook Salmon Management Plan was modified to allow only one fishing during statistical weeks 20 and 21 in the 'inside closure area'.** The 'inside closure area' is defined in 5AAC 24.350(1)(B) and extends from the Steamboat Anchorage to the west side of Big Softuk Channel at Coffee Creek. Scheduled fishing periods will continue if environmental conditions favor upriver salmon migration and Miles Lake sonar is meeting anticipated daily and cumulative counts. While a schedule of two periods per week is the recommended management approach, this schedule could be adjusted to provide for escapement needs. The department will consider using shorter periods, additional inside closures, period closures, or other measures to achieve the required Chinook and sockeye salmon escapements.

The maximum drift gillnet mesh size in Copper River District is 6 inches until July 15 when larger mesh gear will be allowed. As a reminder, **all salmon that are harvested but not sold by commercial permit holders in Alaska waters must be reported on a fish ticket at the time of landing** (5AAC 39.130(c)(10)). Fish tickets have a "not sold/personal use" field to report these salmon.

Whenever possible, the first period each week will begin Monday at 7:00 a.m. Depending upon fishing effort, harvest, and escapement trends on the Copper River Delta and at Miles Lake sonar station, a decision regarding a possible second fishing period for the week will be made by Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. If there is an exceptionally strong run to the Copper River, the department will exercise greater flexibility in deciding when weekly periods should begin. As requested at the 2007 Salmon Harvest Task Force (SHTF) meeting, the second periods in any given week will likely begin at 7:00 a.m. on Thursday.

Beginning in early to mid-August when coho salmon in the harvest become predominant by number, the Copper and Bering River districts will be managed for coho salmon. The management strategy for coho salmon may be one or two 24-hour periods per week depending on escapement and harvest levels. Given satisfactory coho salmon escapement trends and harvest data, the department will consider lengthening the 24-hour period(s) or adding a second period. Weekly anticipated harvest and escapement data will be compared to the actual harvest and escapement data to determine the frequency and duration of commercial openings.

Individuals planning to participate in subsistence fishing activities in Copper River District are required to obtain a subsistence permit through the Cordova ADF&G office. **Permits will be available during normal business hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.** ADF&G staff will not be available to issue permits before hours, after hours, on state holidays, or on weekends.

Bering River District

Bering River District is expected to open for the 2012 season only after sockeye salmon escapement is above the lower bound SEG. The Bering River District has not met the lower bound SEG of 20,000 sockeye salmon since 2005. During the 2011 BOF meeting, the Bering River District SEG range was adjusted from 20,000-35,000 sockeye salmon to 15,000-33,000 sockeye salmon. Beginning in early August, the Bering River District will be managed for coho salmon and management strategies will be similar to those used for Copper River District. The 2012 commercial common property harvest projections for the Bering River District are 17,000 sockeye and 53,000 coho salmon.

Eshamy District

PWSAC's Main Bay Hatchery forecast is 1.2 million sockeye salmon. In 2012 PWSAC plans to harvest 8,940 sockeye salmon for broodstock. PWSAC announced at the general board meeting on Friday, March 23 that cost recovery would not take place at MBH in 2012. As a result, the management strategy in 2012 will be to provide two extended periods per week in the hatchery subdistrict similar to the strategy used in the past four years. Extended periods may also occur in the Crafton Island Subdistrict provided there are no concerns regarding harvest of wild stocks bound for other districts. Eshamy District will open for the 2012 season during the week of May 28.

The 2006–2010 Commercial Operators Annual Report (COAR) exvessel value calculated the set gillnet fleet harvest at 3.7% of the annual commercial salmon harvest. Consequently in 2012, the set gillnet fleet will not be restricted to 36 hours or less per week after July 10.

Eshamy River escapement will be assessed with a video monitoring system in 2012. The wild stock sockeye salmon run to Eshamy Lake is forecast at 53,000 fish, 33,000 of which will be needed to meet the midpoint of the 13,000–28,000 biological escapement goal (BEG) range. This BEG range was adjusted at the 2008 BOF meeting from the previous range of 20,000-40,000 fish. Beginning in mid-July, fishing time and area in Crafton Island Subdistrict will be driven by escapement of wild pink and sockeye salmon in Eshamy District, and the strength of wild pink and chum salmon runs to the Northwestern, Coghill and Northern districts. When waters of Crafton Island Subdistrict are closed for the protection of pink and sockeye salmon escapement, there may be concurrent closures of the eastern shore of Chenega Island to purse seine gear to further minimize the interception of wild stocks.

Coghill District

The 2012 wild stock sockeye salmon run to Coghill Lake is forecast at 321,000 fish. During the 2011 BOF meeting the Coghill Lake sockeye salmon SEG range was changed from 20,000-40,000 fish to 20,000-60,000. Achieving a midpoint escapement of 40,000 sockeye salmon will leave approximately 281,000 fish for the common property harvest. The early run of chum salmon to WNH is forecast by PWSAC to be 1.0 million fish. PWSAC requires 380,000 chum salmon for

cost recovery and broodstock at this facility, leaving 660,000 or 63% for the commercial common property fishery. Coghill District will open for the 2012 season during the week of May 28.

The 2006–2010 COAR exvessel value calculated the drift gillnet fleet harvest at 39.1% of the annual commercial salmon harvest. In 2012, the drift gillnet fleet will be allowed exclusive access to Esther Hatchery Subdistrict until July 21.

The Granite Bay Subdistrict was incorporated into the WNH management plan during the 2011 BOF meeting. This subdistrict will be managed to achieve PWSAC corporate escapement goals when management of Esther and Perry Island subdistricts is not adequately achieving these goals.

The BOF supported the use of a reduced Esther Subdistrict boundary when the Coghill Lake sockeye salmon escapement goal may not be met. During escapement shortfalls, the department has confined fishing to within 1 nautical mile off the southern portion of Esther Island. The 1 nautical mile boundary may be implemented by emergency order for the conservation of Coghill Lake sockeye salmon and Port Wells wild stock chum and pink salmon. If escapement to Coghill Lake is less than anticipated, the department may elect to further confine the fleet to the WNH Terminal Harvest Area (THA). If sockeye salmon escapement is within the anticipated range and sockeye salmon harvest rates in Coghill District indicate a strong run, the Port Wells area will be regularly opened north to the markers near Coghill Lagoon. If the Coghill River weir escapement counts exceed the escapement goal, fishing area may be expanded to the mouth of Coghill River. If the drift gillnet fleet does not appear to be able to harvest available surplus Coghill Lake sockeye salmon, the purse seine fleet may be allowed to fish north of 61° in the Coghill District.

WNH coho salmon are present in the Coghill District fishery from early August through late September. The 2012 run to WNH is expected to be 245,000 coho salmon. PWSAC will require 2,700 fish for broodstock with all remaining fish available to the common property fisheries. Although some WNH fish are harvested in the southern areas of PWS, most of the coho salmon run will be harvested by the drift gillnet fleet in Esther Subdistrict.

Unakwik District

The 2012 wild stock sockeye salmon commercial harvest in Unakwik Inlet is forecast at 7,000 fish. Drift gillnets and purse seines are legal gear during all periods in Unakwik District. The district encompasses only those waters above the reef in Unakwik Inlet. During the sockeye salmon run to Miners and Cowpen lakes, the management strategy will be to provide two periods per week. This schedule is expected to begin in early June, and run concurrently with openings in Coghill District. Commercial harvest and escapement information will be evaluated inseason and adjustments to fishing schedules will be made if necessary. Unakwik District will open for the 2012 season on June 14.

Port Chalmers Subdistrict

The most recent 5-year rolling average, 2006–2010, of the COAR exvessel values placed the purse seine fleet at 60.9% of the annual commercial salmon harvest. As a result, the drift gillnet gear group has exclusive access to the Port Chalmers Subdistrict remote release chum salmon fishery in 2012. The commercial common property fishery in Port Chalmers will begin during the week of May 28. A regular schedule of two fishing periods per week is anticipated; a 60-hour fishing period, from 8:00 a.m. Monday to 8:00 p.m. Wednesday, and an 84-hour fishing period,

from 8:00 a.m. Thursday to 8:00 p.m. Sunday. Anadromous stream closures and regulatory closed waters within the open area at Port Chalmers will be suspended during May and June to facilitate the harvest of the enhanced runs. This fishery is anticipated to close in late July.

Purse Seine Fishery

The 2012 pink salmon forecast total run for PWS is 37.5 million fish, of which 30.2 million will be available in the commercial common property fishery (CCPF). This pink salmon total run estimate includes 4.4 million wild stock fish, 13.5 million VFDA fish, and 19.6 million PWSAC hatchery fish. Approximately 2.7 million (20%) of the projected 13.5 million pink salmon run to the VFDA hatchery will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock leaving 10.8 million for CCPF harvest. Approximately 3.4 million (17%) of the projected 19.6 million pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock. The remaining 16.2 million PWSAC pink salmon will be available for CCPF harvest. Based on the department's wild stock pink salmon forecast of 4.4 million fish, there is a potential common property harvest of 3.2 million wild pink salmon. The department will manage for each district's escapement goal, aiming for each district's long-term median, for a combined total of 1.2 million fish.

The 2012 chum salmon forecast total run in PWS is 2.0 million fish. The majority, 1.8 million (90%), are from PWSAC hatchery production. PWSAC forecast a run of 1.0 million chum salmon to WNH, 504,000 fish to Port Chalmers, and 210,000 fish to Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK). Approximately 380,000 chum salmon (38%) will be harvested out of the 1.0 million WNH run for cost recovery and broodstock. **Port Chalmers remote release chum salmon will be available for harvest in the drift gillnet CCPF (5 AAC 24.370(h)(1)) and the AFK remote release chum salmon will be available for harvest in the purse seine CCPF.** Based on the department's wild chum salmon forecast of 236,000 fish, there is a potential common property harvest of 36,000 wild chum salmon. The department will manage for each district's escapement goal, aiming for each district's long-term average, for a combined total of 200,000 fish.

The commercial common property purse seine fishery will begin on Friday, June 1 with a directed fishery targeting the enhanced chum salmon run to the AFK hatchery. A regular schedule of two fishing periods per week is anticipated; a 60-hour fishing period, from 8:00 a.m. Monday to 8:00 p.m. Wednesday, and an 84-hour fishing period, from 8:00 a.m. Thursday to 8:00 p.m. Sunday. Anadromous stream closures and regulatory closed waters within the open area at AFK will be suspended during May and June to facilitate the harvest of the enhanced runs. Areas open to the CCPF in AFK (excluding the AFK Special Harvest Area (SHA)) will close in mid-July as management begins to focus on pink salmon returns. The AFK SHA will remain open until pink salmon dominate the harvest and are in concentrations sufficient to sustain sizable cost recovery harvests. Daily 14-hour fishing periods will commence for the open area at AFK on Monday, July 16, which will provide more frequent updates on chum and pink salmon harvests.

The general waters of the eight purse seine districts will be managed based on the strength of wild stocks. Hatchery subdistricts will be managed based on the strength of both wild and enhanced stocks. Aerial survey pink and chum salmon escapement trends compared to average historical performance will determine the duration of openings in these districts. Aerial surveys of the index streams occur on a weekly basis, weather permitting.

The department has used yellow SHTF markers in the past to close terminal wild stock areas, both for escapement and quality concerns. In the past, processors effectively directed their fleets to fish in areas where they would maintain an acceptably high quality harvest. The coordinates for these

markers are available to the public, and processors may again direct their fleets to maintain a high quality harvest using these markers. The department will employ these markers for quality concerns only if given clear direction by members of the SHTF. The department may use the yellow SHTF markers as a management tool for closing terminal wild stock areas when escapements are lower than expected, and these markers may be employed as an intermediate step before area wide closures are used.

Openings in Eastern District will be based upon the strength of wild and enhanced runs. Valdez Arm, Valdez Narrows, and Port Valdez may be managed for VFDA's cost recovery and broodstock needs. Openings in Valdez Arm and Port Valdez designed to target VFDA pink salmon will be based on the strength of the enhanced run and VFDA's progress towards achieving their pink salmon revenue goal. In the remainder of Eastern District, openings will be based upon the strength of wild stock escapements. The management strategy will be to open area within the district concurrent with openings targeting the VFDA pink salmon run when possible. Jack Bay may be closed inside a line from Tongue Point to Entrance Point or at the SHTF markers to protect early timed wild stocks. If the Galena Bay or Sawmill Bay wild stocks experience shortfalls during the VFDA run, additional area closures may result. Port Valdez will be closed to CCPF north of a line from Entrance Point to Potato Point beginning on August 15. Valdez Narrows Subdistrict will open on September 4 to target surplus Solomon Gulch Hatchery coho salmon. The VFDA enhanced coho salmon forecast is 129,000 fish with an anticipated CCPF harvest of 62,000 fish.

The AFK, CCH, and WNH pink salmon runs will be managed collectively to achieve PWSAC's cost recovery and broodstock goals through openings and closures of nearby subdistricts or hatchery management areas. Managing the enhanced pink salmon run in aggregate may result in site-specific commercial common property harvest rates above or below the approximate target of an 83% CCPF pink salmon harvest. Prior to run entry sustaining consistent hatchery cost recovery harvest, the department may open the WNH, CCH, and AFK Hatchery THAs and SHAs to a common property harvest to keep pink salmon quality high. Once cost recovery is initiated, PWSAC's expectation is that they will likely complete at least 70-80% of their pink salmon cost recovery harvest goal prior to recommending an opening of the CCPF in the hatchery subdistricts. PWSAC will work closely with local ADF&G management biologists to achieve the seine fisheries revenue goal as rapidly as possible to allow for an orderly and consistent common property fishery. To minimize congestion in hatchery terminal areas and subdistricts, effort will be made to provide concurrent openings at CCH, WNH, and AFK hatcheries. However, PWSAC's cost recovery and broodstock harvest requirements may not always provide the opportunity for a common property harvest at all three hatcheries. Late pink salmon run management is closely linked with PWSAC's sales harvesting strategies.

The department will evaluate the late pink salmon run daily with hatchery sales harvests, broodstock collections, commercial fishery harvests, hatchery sex ratios, stock composition estimates, and wild stock escapement data. To further assess run strength and timing of late enhanced pink salmon, a Southwestern District test fishery, using the R/V *Solstice*, will be conducted in late July. Otoliths collected from daily test sets made at key migration corridors will provide stock composition estimates. Stock composition and sex ratios will provide early run entry information and allow for more informed management decisions about time and area restrictions in Southwestern District. Additionally, harvest rate may provide a qualitative gauge of run strength, timing, and quality.

Table 1. ADF&G commercial common property harvest projections for the 2012 salmon fishery in the Prince William Sound and Copper/Bering River areas.

PINK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Millions)

Natural Stocks	3.2
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Solomon Gulch	10.8
Armin F. Koernig	6.3
Wally Noerenberg	5.2
Cannery Creek	4.6
Natural & Hatchery	30.1

CHUM SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Natural Stocks	36
Hatchery Stocks	
Wally Noerenberg	1,040
Armin F. Koernig	210
Port Chalmers	504
Natural & Hatchery	1,790

COHO SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

PWS Natural Stocks	No Forecast
Copper River	281
Bering River	53
Hatchery Stocks	
Solomon Gulch	62
Wally Noerenberg	242
Natural & Hatchery	639

SOCKEYE SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Copper River	1,230
Bering River	17
Coghill Lake	291
Eshamy Lake	33
PWS Hatchery Stocks	
Main Bay	1,182
Marsha Bay	8
Natural & Hatchery	2,768

CHINOOK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Natural Stocks	
Copper River	20

^a Potential hatchery contributions to the common property harvest are based on the forecast of total hatchery runs minus preseason estimates of cost recovery and broodstock harvest that will be required by hatchery operators.